THE IMPORTANCE OF CARBONDALE CITY HALL IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Carbondale City Hall is not only an embodiment in brick and bluestone of the Romanesque Revival style of architecture, it is, at the same time, an embodiment in brick and bluestone of the values and beliefs of late nineteenth-century America.

What are some of the values and beliefs that are incarnated in Carbondale City Hall? The following can be named: a high regard for materials and principles of construction, a predilection for the forthright and the utilitarian and the stable, a willingness to tolerate variation, an ability to establish unity from a great many seemingly disparate elements, a belief in oneself and in the future, an insistance on honesty, integrity and self-reliance. Those values and beliefs are, it can be argued, the values and beliefs that constitute the cornerstone of the American democracy.

To contemplate Carbondale City Hall from the perspective of the present is, therefore, to contemplate the ethical structure of pioneer America. In contemplating that structure, it is inevitable that we compare and contrast ourselves and our world with the world that is embodied in brick and bluestone in the building before us. We are, to be sure, neither better nor worse because of our similarities to and our differences from pioneer America, but because we have, in undertaking that experience, seen ourselves in terms of our ethical roots, we are the better for the experience.

To contemplate Carbondale City Hall from the perspective of the present is, at the same time, to contemplate an aesthetic structure that was created during the late nineteenth century in America. To contemplate that structure as an autonomous aesthetic phenomenon is to regard the givens embodied therein as ends unto themselves. Those givens are, to be sure, neither more nor less valid than the givens of our world. If, in contemplating that structure, we acknowledge that fact, we have learned the meaning of tolerance. To contemplate the givens embodied in Carbondale City Hall from the perspective of the present as ends unto themselves is, therefore, to contemplate a phenomenon that is, in fact, a work of art.